Worcester. Nov. 30. 1854.

(Thanksgiving Day.)

Dear Mrs. Chapman

Pray do not think me ungrateful for your kind note because I have not answered it instantly; I did not wish to write very hastily or carelessly & have waited from day to day in hopes to do something better than this; but each day has been frittered away in trivial cares & excitements; & as you say yourself, it is difficult to write history & to live history at the same time

You are aware that the Burns case, or its consequences, cannot yet be regarded as over. Our trials on the State process have been constantly delayed by the pressure of cases under the higher law (which by statute take precedence of all others) — & as those cases do not diminish, the District Attorney almost despairs of ever reaching ours, & would gladly throw them up, if he with propriety could do so. The United States processes are as yet only being announced, in fact as they have yet been read public, & I do not yet know whether I shall come in for a share of them or not. We are all glad that Theo. Parker should be indicted, it must result in a triumph of him in any event, but it is almost to suppose that a Mass. Jury will find him guilty. I think this is no fault the understanding of some on the Grand Jury who voted to find a bill against him — they knew that to have no one come of him & were not unwilling that the Anti Slavery excitement should be kept up, in this way.

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You have seen in the Literature the account of the Bertram riot in this city — it was really a very remarkable affair — as genuine a popular exhibition as the Gordon riots of Maryland by the London mobs. But there was a sort of dramatic perfection about this; the entire disappearance of Bertram's own friends leaving him to be literally & absolutely saved by abolitionists; — the fortunate presence of just the right persons — Messrs Hoar, Foster, Storrow & myself — I mean the right persons dramatically speaking; this joined with the really honest escape of the man & the thorough frightening of those who had frightened so many; — all these gave a tinge of romance to the whole thing, such as was perhaps never surpassed. It can be worked up better than was ever the Bateman trick by some future Scott. You cannot conceive how frightened the poor wretch was — our City Marshal could not induce him to take the cars anywhere between here & Boston — he had to drive him all the way, most unwillingly; he would scarcely even allow the horses to be changed at Framingham, but finally got out in a by-place, ~~Lincoln~~ Concord I think in the woods & could not be found for an hour. He would not even enter Boston till after night-fall & would not go to his own house then, lest he should be waylaid — but went to an obscure hotel!! If Worcester frightens ex-kidnappers thus, you may imagine how it would be with those who should pursue the profession.

I thought you would like to hear these things, & now for the immediate object of my note. I was a little frightened myself, fearing lest you give me credit for larger plans than I have yet formed. The fact is that if it should take a dozen lives to do all the things I have vaguely dreamed of doing, I am not sure even of one. I am rather glad to have the whole Atlantic between

Lee & the great European libraries — my brain would not bear a much heavier neighborhood, I fear.

I do believe unequivocally that there are normal points of view from which all history is beginning. Oh sea is a new light & that in this new light it must be re-written; — & one of these, perhaps as yet the most important, is the position taken by the Women's Rights advocates. But to undertake how & prepare this revised state = what would be readers — it can only be done in fragments.

[Dec. 7. Here comes a week's interval, during which I have been arraigned before the U.S. Court & held for trial in March — which will probably put an end to the State process, & come nearer to a trial for High Treason "which you know hath always been considered the crime of a gentleman". To continue; —]

The specialité to which I should like to devote myself for a year or two, had I time would be a history of women in Italy — or more modestly — a literary history of Italian women — from the time of the revival of letters downward — beginning that is, with Properzia de Rossi & Vittoria Colonna & ending with the last female professors Clotilda Tambroni & Maria Dalle-Donne. At the Athenæum in the Westminster (a well read man too) pastes one these women as forgotten celebrities — but they ought not to be so. Mrs. Hale in her bulky book has drawn on the Italian sources & told more about them than any one else. But the book Mrs. Dale has also written slightly upon it in the Ana — she is a good explorer, but in fact about the only female student I know in America — but she wants literary talent & cannot use well what she obtains.

The authorities for these matters are the Italian literary histories, Tiraboschi, Ginguené, &c — the Biographies

Universelle – several Italian collections of female biography & that is all. I think there must be French or German compilations or essays bearing on this subject – corresponding to Cousin's Mlle de Longueville & such books – but know of none.

There are French books on the Provinces & Pontadour I know – but my plan would hardly go back so far.

Are there important to this, is to consult the transactions of learned societies, especially that of Bologna, the Italian academies being often quite a sphere for women. These may be found, I think at the Astor Library, in N.Y., but nowhere else & I may yet be able to consult them there.

I find it quite hard even to obtain authorities as to the academical forms & ceremonies, under which women were honored & crowned. I think the two authorities are Bullarium (in Bonday) de Univ. Parisiense & a more modern book by Crevier – neither of which I can here obtain. Nor can I procure the standard work on learned academies by Jarckius.

Do you see the disadvantages of students who undertake to explore a new vein in this country, even if they were less overwhelmed with other employment than I am. But I wish you would undertake it.

I am determined however to write at least a lecture or essay (for Putnam's Magazine) on this subject – & if you can help me to authorities (with the titles of the books) I shall be very grateful – & if you will collect anything that seems to you of value & send it to me hereafter the use of your MSS. it would be valuable. I forgot to mention one book, which I sent out for, but found it cost beyond my means, Le Roux de Lincy – de Femmes célèbres, I have not the exact title at hand. I should like to know what sort of a book that is, & whether I had better get it, after all, when I can afford it.

2(11)54

I thank you much for M. Guépin's note & am glad to find so learned a man taking up the cause of woman in the face of such a counter-revolutionist (on this point) as Comte, who coolly asserts it as the tendency of all true social progress to confine woman more exclusively to domestic life.

Dec. 15. Another delay — & I now write from the vicinity of Bangor, where I am lecturing this week. I have carried this note about with me, hoping to finish it. I hope that you will be able to get from it some idea of my plans & purposes, & I must leave it to your own judgment how far you can assist me.

One of the most important services that could be rendered to the Woman's Rights movement in this country would be either a translation into French of one of our tracts, or a notice of the same in the Revue des deux Mondes. The best I can hear what a step is gained for anything undertaken in this country, if an echo can be heard from across the water. The best adapted for this would be Thos. Parker's sermon, My Trowan & Her Rights & Mrs. Stanton's admirable Appeal to the N.Y. Legislature. The two first of these have been reprinted by Chapman in London.

Lucy Stone with her usual energy has led a series of five Tracts stereotyped, & has also a plan for prize stories, & has raised money for these. Lucy is the Queen Bee in this matter, & delights the whole county for Maine & Kentucky — She is a Lonesdale road down here on the Penobscot, after one visit a year ago. You have no idea of the eloquence & power which have been developed in her; she is one of the great Providences in History.

I must not forget to thank you for M. Guépin's little note, though he attributes to me too vast a design. Also I have seen (thro' your sisters) some French newspapers with his articles on the Boston affairs &c. I have also his Philosophie du XIXe Siècle — & shall confess that I was disappointed in it

It is learned, it seemed to me rather confused in its order, nor did I like its philosophy — still I still like to know him. I was pleased with his American sympathies, & a little amused at the way W.B. Greene had first dazzled him & then damned him with Greeneisms in political & theological matters. The Christian Baptists would hardly know themselves — But I have seriously thought of translating the reflections of American women, for some of your periodicals — or the Echo policy afterwards — I beg this yet. Please say so when you write to M. Guépin or to him — with my compliments & thanks.

I know this note will disappoint you, dear Mrs Chapman, but I cannot help it: I only wish that my plan of literary work were large enough & definite enough to mark out more precisely what I want of you. But I cannot settle it to-morrow — though I still hope to hear from you somehow. And I hope we shall not always be deprived of you in this country where you are so important. Some quick or we may have civil war before you arrive & test your non-resistance still further. Perhaps it would go where Miss Grimke's has gone.

With kind & respectful regards to your household I am yours cordially

T.W. Higginson

MS. A.9.2.28.34

Madame

Madame Chapman

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Paris

1854

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